

Presentation for The Education and the Work Force Committee

By Dr. Shirley L. Lorenzo

July 27, 1999

I would like to thank you as Honorable Representatives for inviting me to speak to you about a subject I hold dear - public education and Title 1 funding. My name is Shirley Lorenzo and I represent Pinellas County, Florida, more specifically Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Elementary School. I come to speak to you as the principal of Rawlings, an urban Title 1 school with 59 percent of our students on free and reduced lunch and a school that has a 35 % mobility rate. We have 843 students with 100 of our student body in special education programs. But more importantly we are a school that is making a difference in the everyday lives of children and their families.

Six years ago, when our school was opened it was clear that boys and girls in the community were coming to school with greater and greater needs. Reading, writing, and math scores indicated that children entering the school had serious deficits in academic achievement and if left alone on the same path, it was predictable that just the newness of this school with all its prettiness probably would not make a big difference to these children. Hence Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings was created utilizing new concepts and processes to solve growing problems.

Rawlings has enjoyed success and we feel as a school that it is attributable to four factors. The first has been a system wide commitment to using Malcolm Baldrige criteria to improve the school organizationally. With this commitment to quality came continual

improvement, decisions based on data, and organizational core values that quickly drives improvement change. Closely aligned with organizational systems thinking is the second factor which has been a commitment to shared leadership and a school culture which truly values human life and their interactions, child to adult, adult to adult or child to child. This shared leadership infused in a system invigorates and excites the school as a total learning community. Each person, including children are viewed as leaders, responsible for their own learning and each is also responsible to help everyone in the community succeed.

The third factor that has been so important to sustained school improvement has been the stability and flexibility of funding from sources such as Title 1 monies, state school improvement monies, and state and federal technology funds. These funds have allowed innovative change that would not have been possible otherwise. These funds have allowed monies to support collaborative meetings, training, research, and searches for best practices.

Finally, it is the "schoolwide" concept that has given the school community real input and power into the decision making process. This discretionary power enables a school to make school based decisions rather than relying solely on county, state or federal ideas or directives for school change. The schoolwide concept allows a unique opportunity for school based research, data gathering and decision making about programs and practices that are good for students in their own school. It is very exciting and empowering to work in a system that has a culture and a climate that values school educators, parents and community members working together to make improvements for their school and

for their children with unique needs. This is the type of change that creates exciting sustained growth. It is this discretionary power over important funds that has allowed us to make wise school based decisions.

When Rawlings began it embarked on a serious mission to help every child achieve to their potential in basic academic areas. Each teacher, support staff member, custodian, administrator, parent and child recognized the seriousness of this mission. Together they concentrated on reading, writing and math and joined with one mind and purpose to get the job done.

The use of Malcolm Baldrige criteria and quality core values which bring a systems approach to what we do was used by Rawlings from its inception.. For years, businesses have used these criteria effectively to bring about organizational change and now several states, including Florida, have developed a self assessment process based on the Malcolm Baldrige criteria. Schools can apply for what's known as the Sterling award of Florida by writing a self examination document, allowing outside examiners to come to the school site for verification, and finally having a juried recognition system determining if the organization, in this case a school, shows the type of success that is exemplary for that organization. I am proud to say our school underwent this self examination process in 1998, was awarded a site visit and awarded recognition as the first school in the state of Florida to win the Sterling award in the field of education. We are proud of the accomplishments that we have made in six years and for the successes our children have achieved. Statistically our disadvantaged population

should not be showing the gains they are exhibiting. Let me share some of the data with you that I'm talking about. (See graphs) The first graph shows a comparison of district, state, and school average scores and a gap analysis of the school's growth over a 6 year period on a criterion referenced state exam. Our writing scores exceed both our district and state averages. Following along in the next graphs you will note a positive trend again for math and reading over a 6 year period. We continue to show positive sustained growth even though our economic deprivation factor continues to increase each year and the mobility of our population increases.

As our school has worked with quality systems, aligning every process to our mission and goals, we have worked as a full staff in making sure that our Title one dollars are spent effectively. Decisions are made with full staff and community input. Everyone knows why we are spending the money we decide to spend. Everyone feels real ownership and accountability for the use of the funds and looks hungrily at data to reflect what is working and what is not working. For example, we made a schoolwide decision based on data and research to put in a massive school wide tutoring program for helping children acquire math skills by utilizing every available person on a specific day of the week to teach math for a year in addition to a child's regular math instruction. After a year's work we had positive results and after analyzing the data, decided to put in a similar program for reading. After carefully analyzing the data at the end of the year we realized reading takes greater skill and finesse to teach than math computation skills. Not just anyone can teach reading. We have adjusted our research and training in reading and intensified our approach using skilled classroom teachers with our

most struggling students. Research by Richard Allington and others suggest that often struggling students are left to volunteers for remedial work or teacher aides or paraprofessionals. Our research now indicates that with more intensive work by highly trained teachers, children make greater gains and the use of Title 1 funds can be more wisely spent. We now employ two extra teachers to reduce class size and to help intensify our approach to reading. We also employ 5 paraprofessionals with 2 years of college skill. They are trained to assist in specific classrooms giving more teachers a chance to work with small groups especially in lower grades. All of these "schoolwide" decisions are made with full staff knowledge and input. When we have success we celebrate "schoolwide" and when our gains are not what we would like, we analyze and problem solve "schoolwide".

What a contrast to the days of "Chapter 1" when funds were expended to help only a few specific children. It was rare for the staff to be involved in making decisions that affected their children. Training for the Chapter 1 staff was parallel but separate. Services were also parallel to the classroom but separate. The Chapter 1 program, while well intentioned, was an isolated pull out program which had wonderful goals and dreams for children but often ended up labeling and stigmatizing children while trying to service them. Children were pulled away from the continuity of the school day, isolated from the mainstream, and remediated. They were problems to fix.

The schoolwide concept instead encompasses all children, utilizes and aligns all resources, and empowers a school to make the best decisions for all concerned. It models inclusion, not exclusion, it creates

collaboration not isolation. It bonds community and parents with a school in the creative decision making process. It has allowed extra funding greatly needed by a school with a challenging population.

As a school passes the 50 % Federal Economic Level, more factors for being disadvantaged emerge. Diminished resources for families often creates a need for the school to help families as they struggle. Because of this added need for resources and help the complexity of the school begins to change. Parental involvement often becomes decidedly reduced, challenges of uncleanness, hunger, and disease become apparent. Involvement with family services, law officials, court systems, and truancy problems become increasingly common place. Resources that a traditional school has, quickly dwindle and is severely stretched as the poverty index climbs. As a school has more students in poverty situations than not, the difficulty of delivering these services and resources to families and children quickly escalates. Dropping funding to lower and lower levels to partially service all schools or even more schools falling just below the poverty line would dilute the services so vitally needed by the schools with the highest risk. Funding, as currently existing, has allowed schools with the greatest need to make a real difference and has fairly distributed funds on factors that have been researched and documented.

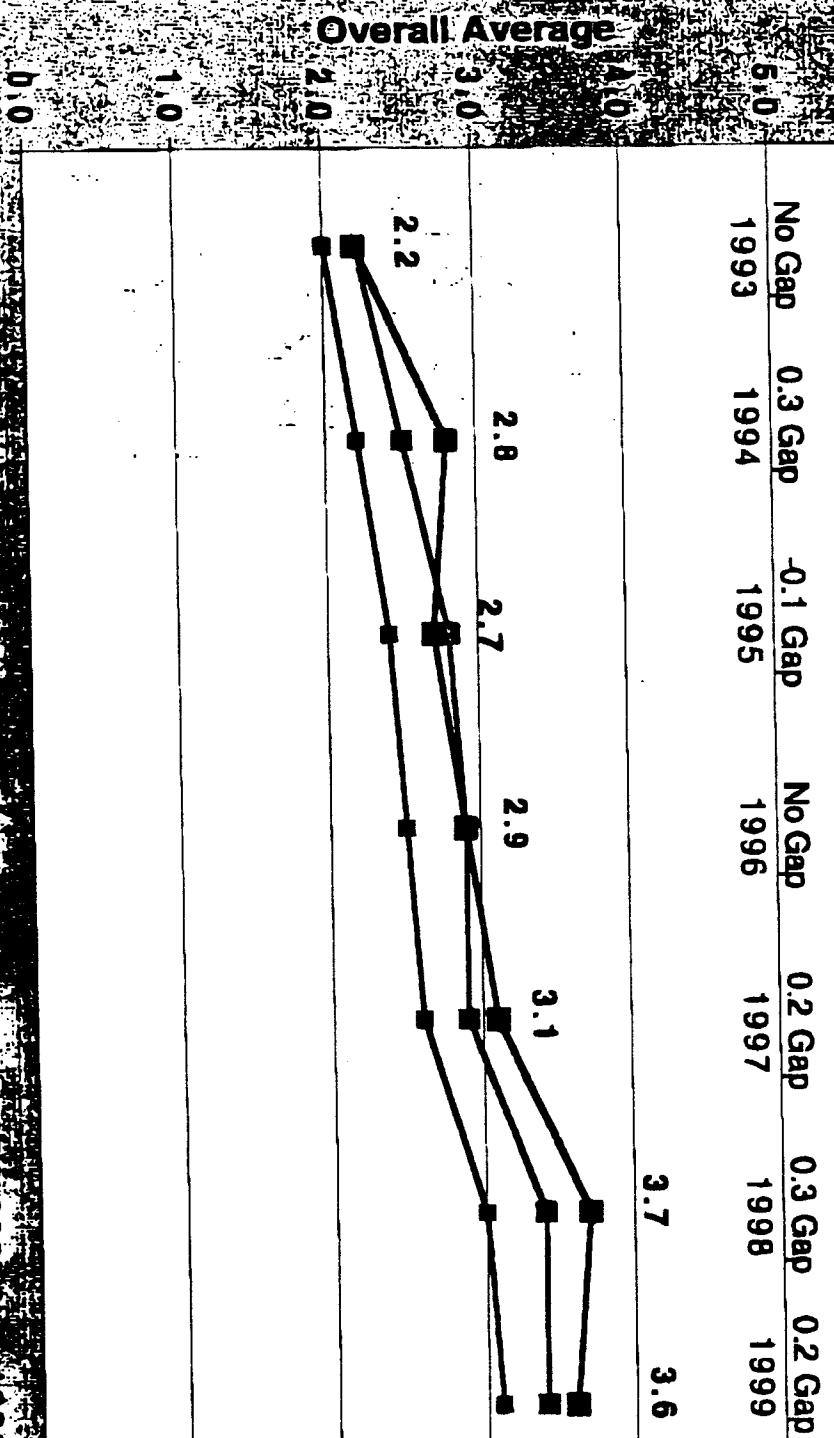
As a last note, schoolwide funding, quality systems, and shared leadership have allowed and encouraged a school like mine to focus their energies for the good of all children. We have created a writing demonstration school with our funds that collaboratively teaches all teachers in the county best writing practices and techniques. We open

our school every Thursday for other teachers to come and learn, and as we teach we learn ourselves. We have also created a professional development site partnered with the University of South Florida to train interns and to embrace and develop young talent in a school that values children and celebrates their successes. This past year we had 25 interns. We have partnered with our community to change the school day. We have extended each day four days a week to gain training time for our staff. Each week on Tuesdays our children leave us mid day so that we can professionally come together to learn about improving our quality systems and the best practices of reading, writing and math. We have developed our own after school tutoring program. As a school community we have agreed that our children should wear uniforms. We enlist the help of our moms, dads, and grandparents to help our children read in a specialized after school reading research project called "Rawlings Reads". We are presently investigating an extended school year, and continue to research and train on current best practice.

Most of this would not have been possible without Title 1 resources. You have given us the means to meet children's needs and to change a child's life positively for the future. Our children and my staff thank you!

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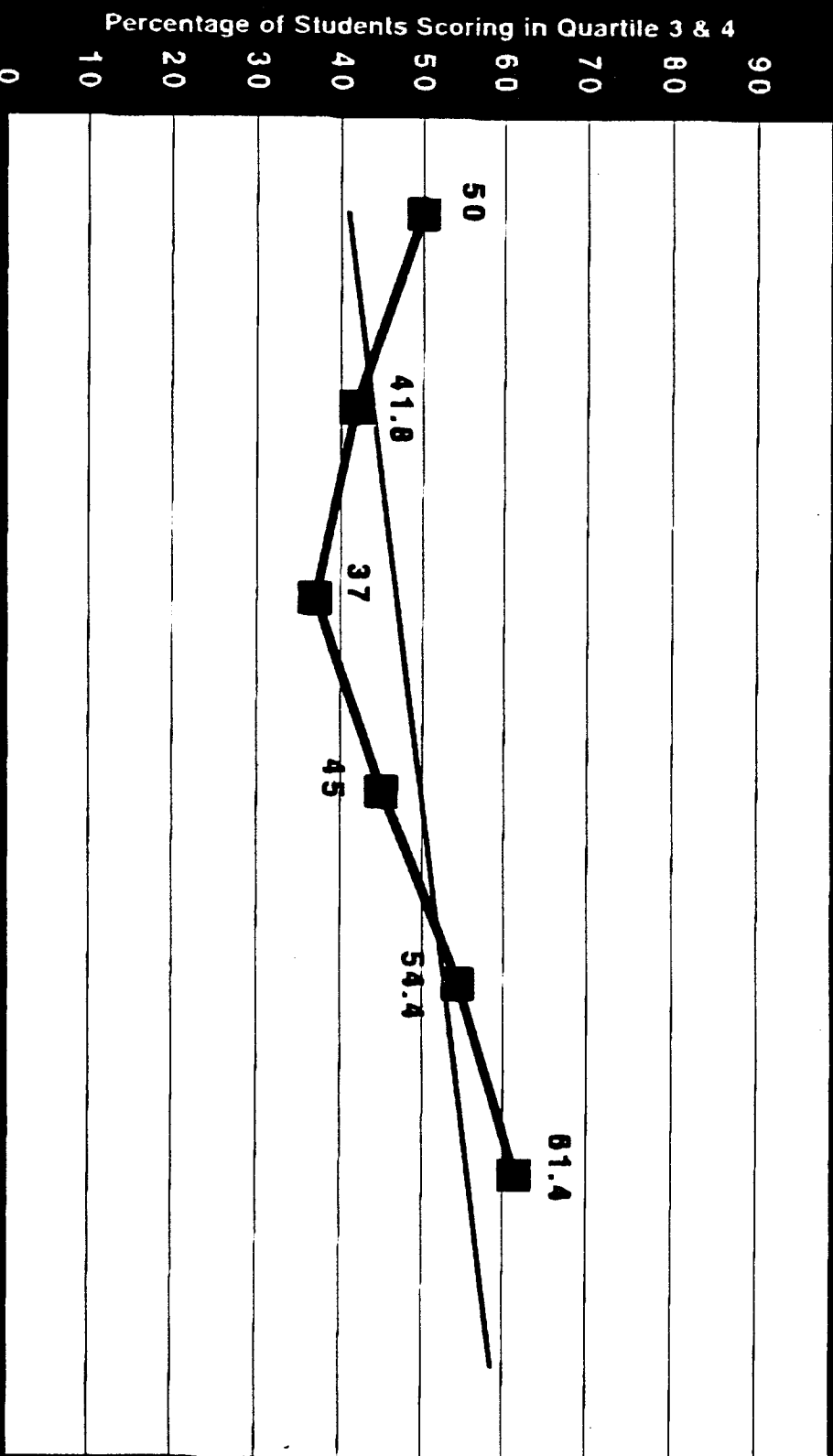
Gap = Comparison of School Scores to District Scores



— State
 — District
 — Rawlings

Year of Administration

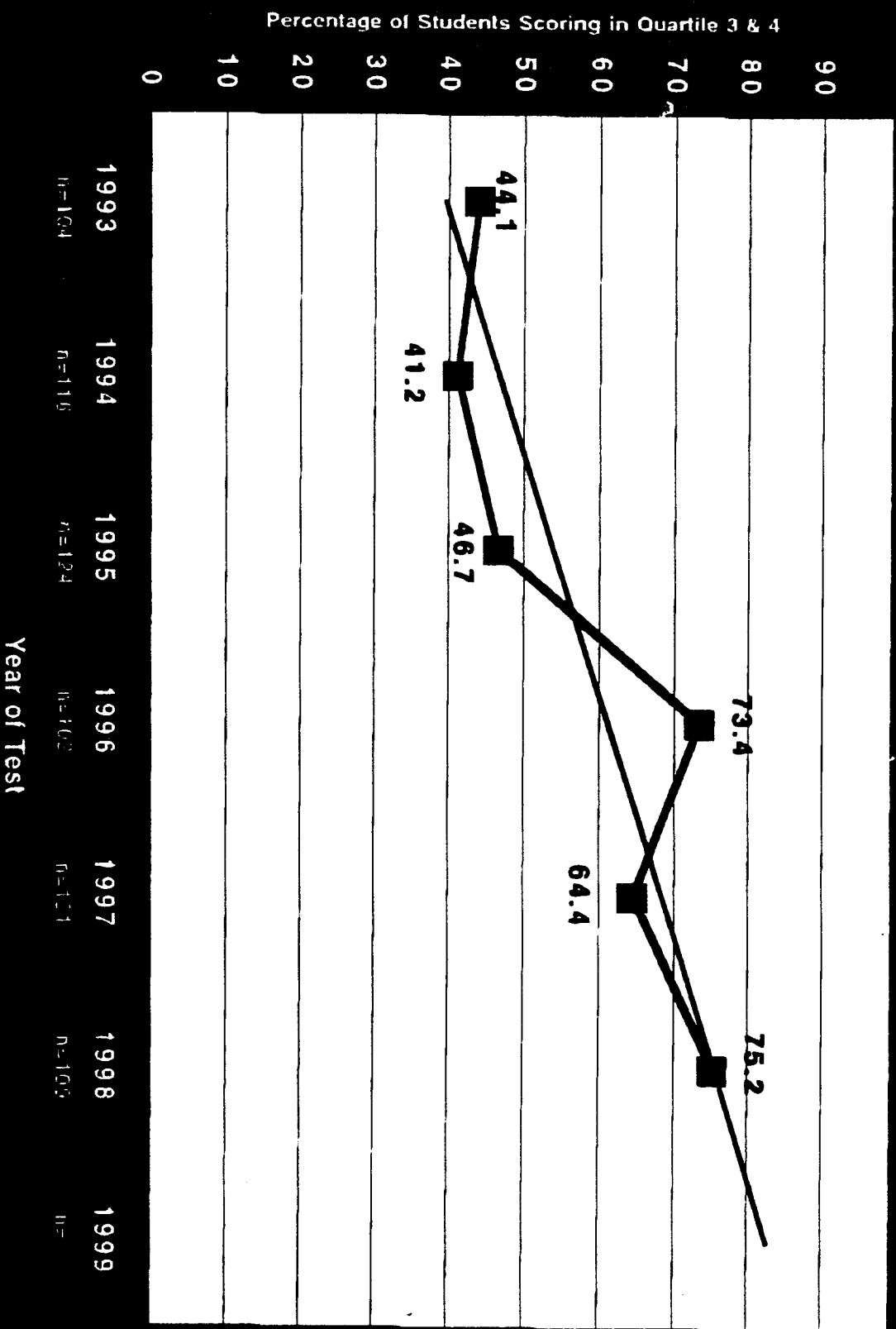
Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills M. K. Rawlings Elementary--Grade 3 Reading



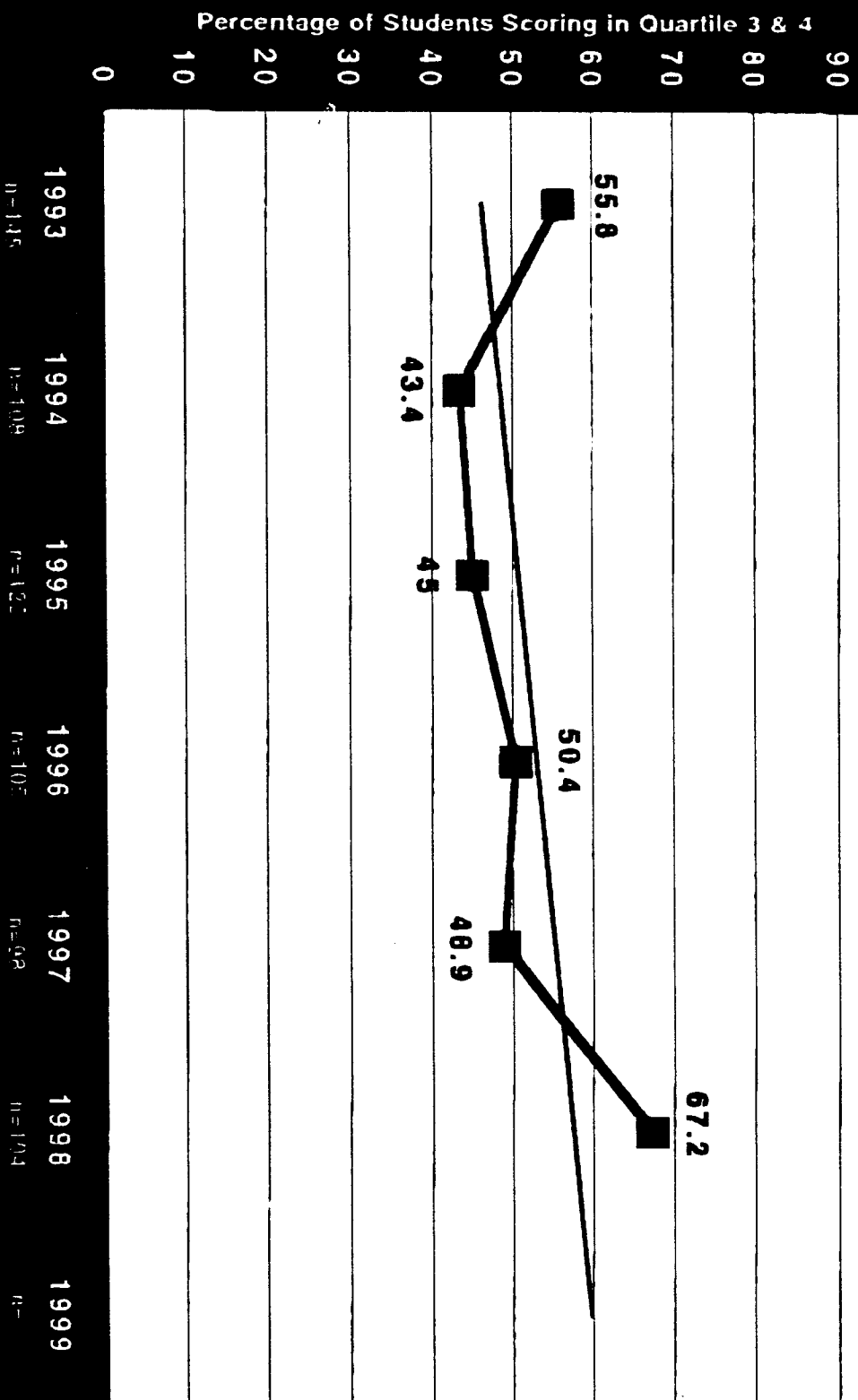
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Year of Test

Performance on Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills M. K. Rawlings Elementary--Grade 3 Mathematics

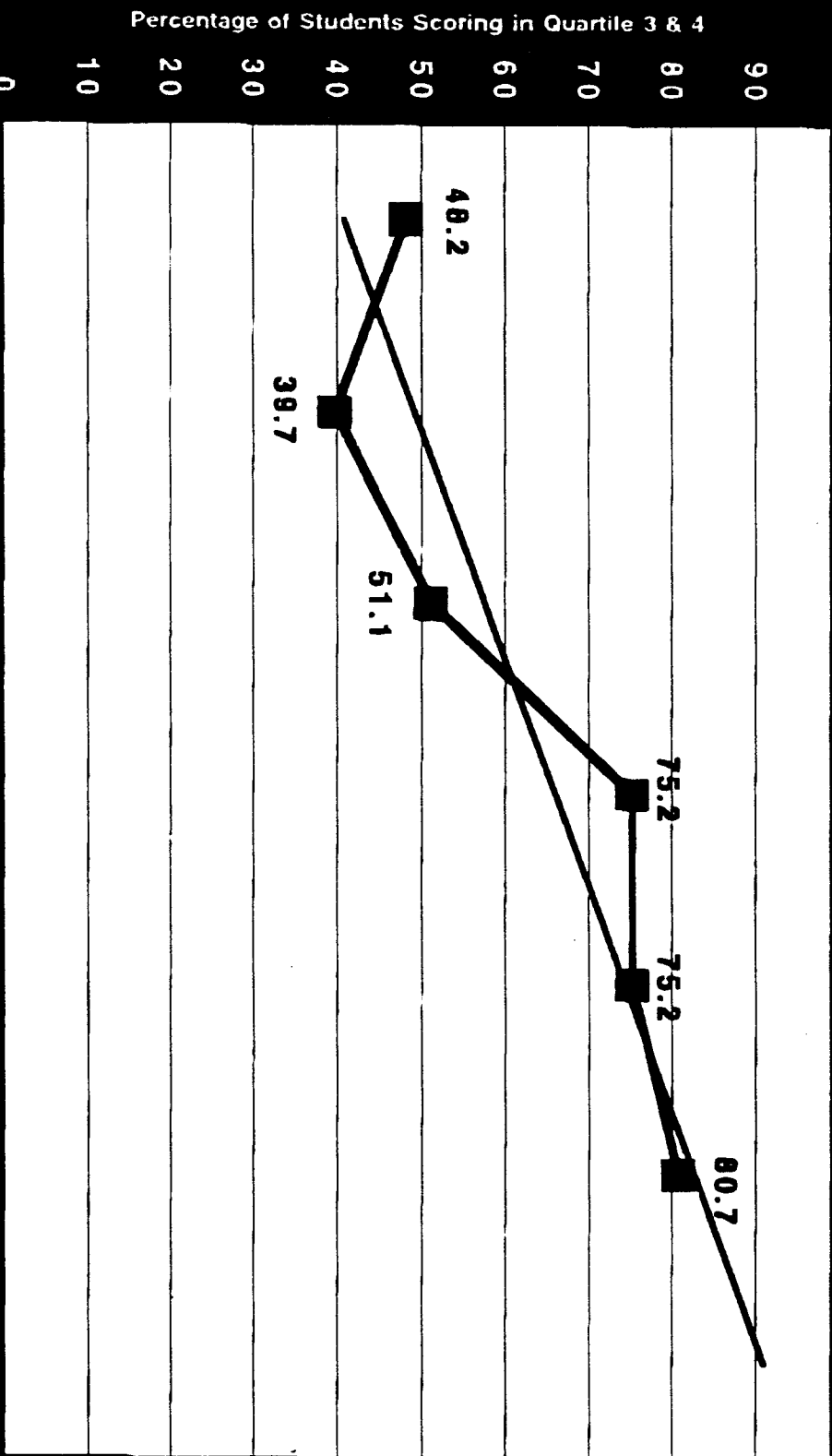


Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills
M. K. Rawlings Elementary--Grade 4 Reading



Year of Test

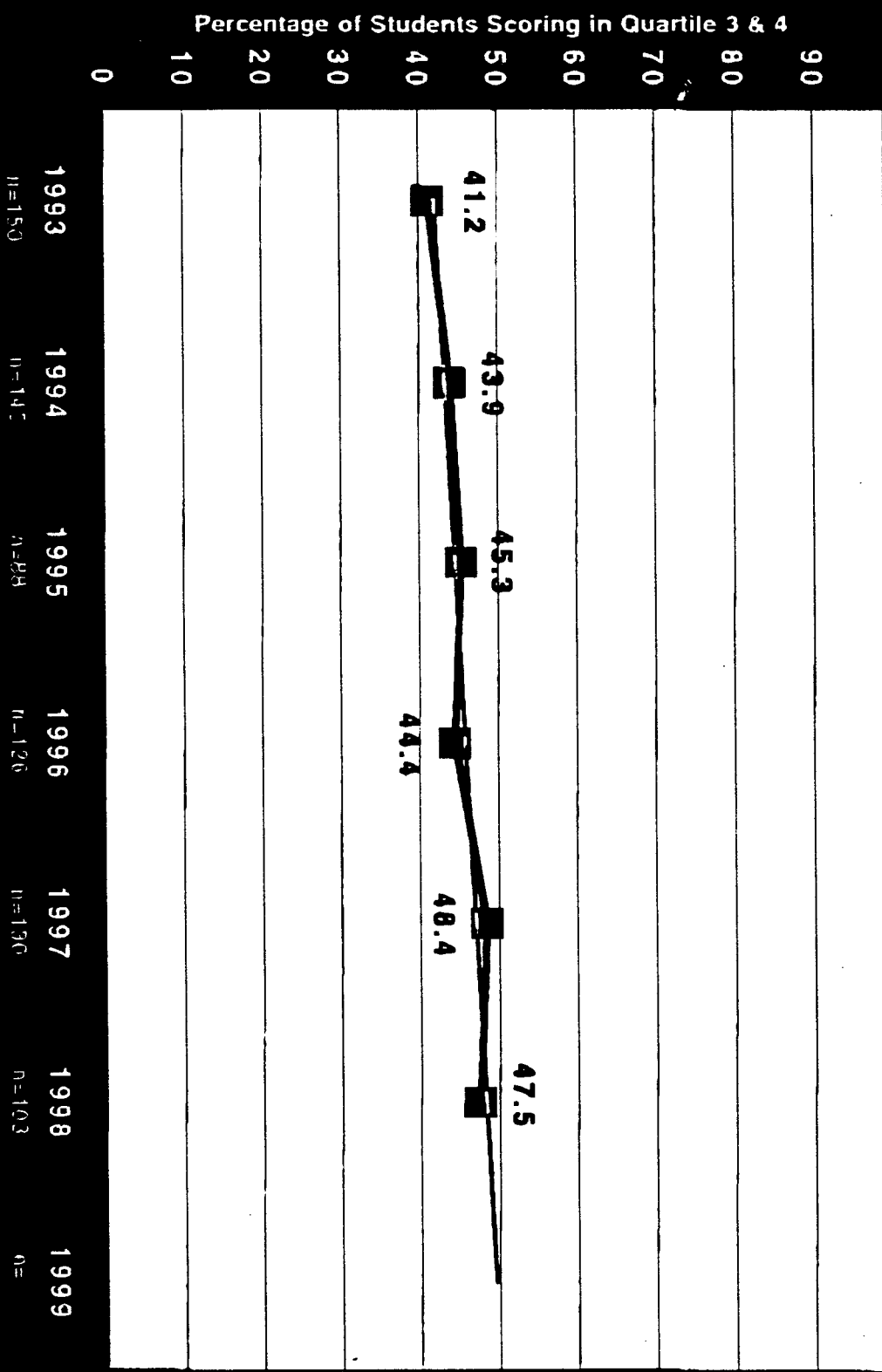
Performance on Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills M. K. Rawlings Elementary--Grade 4 Mathematics



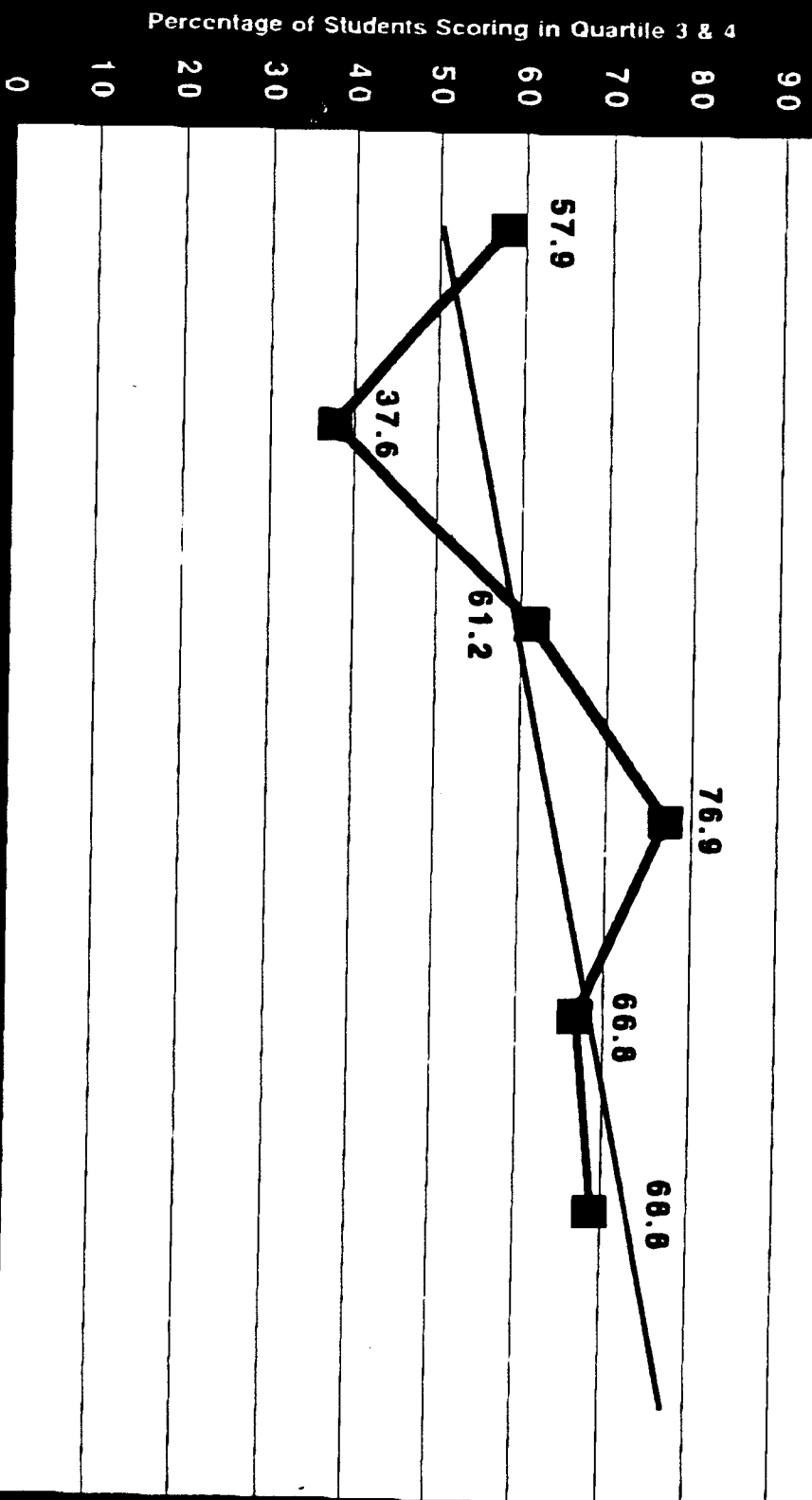
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Year of Test

Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills
M. K. Rawlings Elementary--Grade 5 Reading



Performance on Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills
M. K. Rawlings Elementary--Grade 5 Mathematics



1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
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Year of Test